

# KIRKUS REVIEWS

## **FURNACE CREEK**

Joseph Allen Boone

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A Southern boy is spurred by great expectations in Boone's debut coming-of-age novel.

Newt Seward, as an adult, recalls his teen years in a story that begins on the Fourth of July in 1965, when the narrator, as a 13-year-old, is caught pleasuring himself in the woods by escaped felon and former maid Zithra Jackson Brown, who then blackmails the teen into burglarizing his next-door neighbor and helping her flee town. The bookish deacon's son would also love to get away from rural Franklin County, Virginia, which, as the 1960s unfold in all their revolutionary glory, begins to feel more and more like a backwater. Then, at 15, Newt takes a job as an assistant to eccentric recluse Julian Brewster, the bachelor scion of the local furniture dynasty.

At Julian's estate, Newt encounters the man's orphaned niece and nephew, Mary Jo and Marky Jo Sumner, a pair of enchanting teenage twins who inspire an intense and confusing longing in Newt. His summer with these three peculiar figures will echo throughout the rest of Newt's life, which takes him to elite schools in Boston followed by educations of different sorts in Paris and Rome. Boone's novel follows the structure of Charles Dickens' classic *Great Expectations* as it charts Newt's development through various upheavals of the baby boomer generation.

Boone's prose is lyrical and inventive, merging Dickensian wit and texture with a dash of Southern gothic: "By every account old Julian Brewster was an odd bird, though no more eccentric than the living waxworks that populated every Southern backwater hamlet in 1967." The characters are delicately drawn and elegantly complicated, particularly the obsession-inducing Sumner siblings. It's not that Boone has modernized a classic—this is still a period piece and in some ways feels quite old-fashioned—but he breathes new energy into a number of familiar elements. More importantly, he's assembled them into just the sort of novel with which bibliophiles will be happy to linger.

A queer bildungsroman in a classic, stylish package.